

Testimony of:
Cody Laplante
Client of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind

I am a 16 year old junior attending New Britain High School and I have been a client of BESB since birth. I am in full opposition of bill #6380 because of the proposed split of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind.

Before I was 6 months old I was diagnosed with a condition called macular hypoplasia and was proclaimed legally blind. At this point I am visually impaired with a visual acuity of 20/80. BESB has done so much for me in all areas. Without their services both inside and outside of academics, I would not be as successful as I am today.

BESB has provided me with many necessary services throughout my academic career such as large print books, adaptive equipment, and programs that have given me the opportunity to learn and lead. Without these services, my academic career would have been much more difficult. IF BESB is split into two agencies, it would be overseen by administration that would not understand the needs of those who are visually impaired or blind and as a result these services, as they are, would not be guaranteed.

I myself have also benefited from many BESB programs. One in particular has stood out as being very important and that is College Day held about three months ago. As a junior in high school, this program was very important to my smooth transition into college life. At this program, staff from both the children's services department and the adults' services department was present in order to make this life changing transition as painless as possible. This program was made a reality because both departments are in one building. It is extremely important for clients my age who are now dealing with both departments that they be in close proximity to each other in order to improve communication and the overall efficiency of the change to college and the job market.

I am now planning to major in visual disabilities in college because of the many experiences BESB has provided me. As an intern at BESB's December Sports Adventure weekend and as the senior Counselor in Training at last summer's Camp Abilities Connecticut, I have gotten the opportunity to instruct and teach children who are blind and experienced the joy of teaching another student. If the bill is passed programs such as this will not be guaranteed.

I ask you again to not pass this bill. BESB does so much for the state and the community that splitting up the agency would be a great loss to the great state of Connecticut because the proper education of our students and citizens, especially those with special needs is priceless.